



Royal Commission
into Institutional Responses
to Child Sexual Abuse

Statement

Name Elizabeth Cornelia SEYSENER
Address Known to the Royal Commission
Occupation Retired
Date 28 August 2016

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. My full name is Elizabeth Cornelia SEYSENER. I was born in 1951 in The Netherlands. My family migrated to Australia in 1953. I am an Australian Citizen.
3. In 1974 I completed a Bachelor of Social Work at University of NSW. Following this I was employed as a social worker, and later an Assistant Area Manager, with the Department of Social Security in Sydney up until 1981. In 1982 I returned to Newcastle where I freelanced in counselling or consultancy roles and various temporary social work positions. For example sometime between 1986 and 1987 I worked on a temporary basis as a counsellor with Centacare. In 1991 I co-chaired a Synod for the Catholic Diocese of Newcastle-Maitland (Diocese). From 1994 to 2000 I facilitated two chapters for the Sisters of Mercy and provided regular group facilitation services for them.

Case Study

4. Sometime in 1996, I'm not sure exactly when, myself and Vivienne LLEWELLYN were engaged by the Diocese to review their handling of child sexual abuse by a Diocesan

Signature: Elizabeth C. Seysener Witness: [Signature]

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priest, Father Vincent RYAN. I have been shown a copy of a report titled 'Case Study of Sexual Abuse in the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese' (Case Study) [CTJH.210.01167.0083], which is dated November 1996. It appears to be a photocopy of our Case Study as I recognise the layout and the typeset. I do not recall that the Case Study we submitted had any attachments or appendices.

5. I do not recall exactly how Vivienne and I were engaged to do the Case Study. At the time, Vivienne was the Director of Centacare for the Diocese. I had known Vivienne professionally before this. Though she was older, I had been her supervisor ~~when she was~~ ^{Ed.} when she was a student and on a Social Work Placement in the Department of Social Security in Sydney. At the time she was a Sister with the Good Samaritans but I understand she left the Order at some stage before becoming the Director of Centacare. I remember her being very intelligent and capable.
6. In early 1996 I was working as a freelance counsellor and consultant in the Newcastle area. I don't know who nominated me for the Case Study but I was probably known in local, professional circles as an experienced social worker. I had a particular interest and expertise in responding to trauma and in disaster recovery.
7. I also had personal connections with the Catholic Church. I was a parishioner, and for a period, Parish Secretary, at Toronto in the early 1980's when Father Allan HART was the Parish Priest.

Case Study methodology

8. I recall being informed that the Diocese had been asked to undertake a Case Study on their handling of clergy sexual abuse by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference

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E. C. Seysener

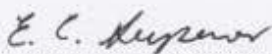
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(Bishop's Conference). I believe the Diocese had already selected Fr RYAN as the subject of the Case Study before I became involved. At the time Fr RYAN had just been convicted of child sexual assault so it was a topical case. Prior to conducting the Case Study I had no knowledge of Fr RYAN except what was in the media and I do not recall that we sought to interview him as part of the Case Study.

9. Bishop Michael MALONE was the Bishop of the Diocese at the time. I don't recall receiving any Terms of Reference, or any verbal or written directions from him or the Diocese on what the Case Study needed to cover. I believe the Bishop's Conference came up with the seven dot-points in the 'Preamble' on page one of the Case Study which listed what we were to address. I believe Vivienne and myself came up with the methodology outlined on pages one and two to meet these seven dot-points.
10. I do not recall Vivienne and I dividing up the Case Study workload in any formal way. Given she was Director of Centacare, I believe she would have been responsible for all official liaison with the Diocese and Bishop MALONE. Because I was not permanently employed at the time and had more availability, I conducted the majority of the interviews. I also wrote the report, with the exception of the recommendations which Vivienne drafted. I recall meeting with her regularly to discuss our progress and Case Study findings.
11. To the best of my recollection, I was not asked by anyone to withhold the names of some individuals from the report. I believe the reason we did not name some people was to protect their privacy. The purpose of the Case Study was to review the Diocesan response to clergy sexual abuse in terms of support to victims and impact on the community. It was not intended to be a forensic examination of Fr RYAN or any other parties.

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Witness:



Monsignor Patrick COTTER

12. The final paragraph on page two, under the heading 'Background Information on Offender' mentions that 'in 1975 disclosures of sexual interference with boys relating to Fr Ryan were made to a Monsignor who was the ecclesial authority at the time'. This is a reference to Monsignor Patrick COTTER.
13. I recall interviewing Monsignor COTTER for the Case Study. At the time I believe he was retired and I met him at the Presbytery of Maitland Parish church. I got the impression that he was not happy to be interviewed for the Case Study, especially by a lay person with no standing in the Church. I don't remember exactly what he said but I would have included all available detail in the report.
14. I do recall that he was evasive about his handling of the 1975 complaints about Fr RYAN and he spoke at length about how paedophilia was not well understood at the time. Having grown up in the Catholic Church where I learned to be deferential to senior clergy, I remember finding it difficult to push Monsignor COTTER on his responses about his actions in 1975.

Sister Evelyn WOODWARD

15. The last paragraph on page two, under the heading 'Background Information on Offender' also mentions that 'the headmistress approached a psychologist in her religious order who immediately spoke to the Monsignor'. I do not recall who the headmistress was, but the psychologist was Sr Evelyn WOODWARD, a nun with the Sisters of St Joseph of Lochinvar. The Monsignor is Monsignor COTTER.

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E. C. Seysener

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16. Sister WOODWARD had a high profile in the Catholic Church community as a psychologist who provided counselling services to Clergy. I recall interviewing her as part of the Case Study, and I probably spoke to her on a number of occasions by phone and in person.
17. Sister WOODWARD is referred to throughout the Case Study as I believe she provided information on the 1975 complaints to Monsignor COTTER. She is the 'locally-based psychologist' referred to in the last paragraph on page three that the Bishop, who at the time was Bishop MALONE, engaged to 'supervise Fr Ryan's mental health. She new [sic] Fr Ryan personally and was the same religious who had been consulted by the headmistress in 1975'.
18. Sister WOODWARD is also the 'religious psychologist' referred to in the second paragraph on page four who 'became aware of the investigation by the police into Fr Ryan from a Sister close to a mother of one of the victims. The source indicated that the information was confidential but the Sister overrode these considerations and, after three unsuccessful attempts to contact the mother directly, reported the matter to the Bishop giving him a day or two's notice before the arrest'. While there are two Sisters mentioned in this paragraph, it is my recollection that it was Sr WOODWARD who overrode the considerations of confidentiality.

Father William BURSTON

19. The first paragraph on page 4 of the Case Study refers to a priest who was a 'trained psychologist and had a continued associations with Fr RYAN'. This is a reference to Fr William (Bill) BURSTON.

Signature: E. C. Seysener Witness: [Signature]

20. I knew Fr BURSTON personally as he was the Director of Centacare when I worked there on a temporary basis between 1986 and 1987. He was the only Diocesan priest I knew with a psychology degree.

21. I do not recall conducting the interview with Fr BURSTON but it is possible I did. The reference to him having 'wondered whether further inappropriate activity was occurring' sounds familiar to me.

Completion of the Case Study

22. I believe I drafted the Case Study on my personal computer which I no longer own. I handwrote all of my interview notes in an exercise book which I destroyed when I retired from practice around two years ago.

23. I do not recall formally submitting the Case Study to the Diocese, though this may have been Vivienne's responsibility. I do not recall ever presenting or discussing the Case Study findings or recommendations with Bishop MALONE or the Diocese.

24. I do not know whether the Diocese actioned any of our specific recommendations, but it is possible they established Zimmerman Services as a result of our Case Study.

Signed: E.C. Seyenser

Date: 28 August 2016

Witness:  A.R. DUNSIRE

Date: 28/8/16